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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HANOI 001683

SIPDIS

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STATE PASS TO EAP/MLS, DRL/AWH, AND INR/EAP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/19/2032  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [VM](#)  
SUBJECT: UNDERGROUND DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS SAY PARTY FEELING  
GROWING THREATS

REF: A. HCMC 805 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. HANOI 1462

[1](#)C. HANOI 1313

[1](#)D. HANOI 1276

[1](#)E. HANOI 1271

[1](#)F. HANOI 922

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Classified By: Political Counselor Brian Aggeler, for Reasons 1.4 (b),  
(c), and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) High-profile political dissidents Dr. Pham Hong Son and Nguyen Vu Binh, both recently released from prison and under house arrest, remain active with the moderate Democratic Party of Vietnam (DPV) underground pro-democracy group. On September 10, Embassy PolOffs visited separately and without interference with both dissidents. Son believes the Party leadership has been shaken by summer land rights protests in HCMC and Hanoi and is fearful of potential legal challenges to long-standing laws on land ownership and usership. He also described reported calls within the GVN leadership for "review" of Article Four of the GVN Constitution, which gives political supremacy to the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). Binh advised the USG not to be fooled by any temporary good behavior by the GVN to secure UNSC non-permanent membership. Both activists appealed for continued and consistent USG pressure on the regime on human rights, democracy and the release of political prisoners. End Summary.

SUMMER LAND RIGHTS PROTESTS SHOOK PARTY

[1](#)2. (C) In a September 10 meeting at his residence, prominent cyber-dissident and underground democracy activist Dr. Pham Hong Son (Ref. B) told Embassy PolOffs that the Communist Party has been weakened by the summer land rights protests in HCMC and Hanoi (Refs. A, D). Son says the GVN leadership is worried about individual claims to property and legal challenges to existing laws on land ownership, which is part of the reason why the GVN is threatened by lawyers, and why so many lawyers are among the dissidents jailed, in the last year, under "national security" laws.

SECURITY FORCES GO TO THE MEDIA

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¶3. (C) As in prior meetings, Son reiterated the need to liberalize the press to support democracy efforts in Vietnam. When the GVN feels threatened, or when security forces are restrained from making arrests or committing violence, they lash out through the state-controlled media. The summer 2007 land rights protests in HCMC and later in Hanoi produced a string of "attack messages" in the media in the last month, in particular targeting protest-involved dissidents Thich Quang Do and Thich Khong Thanh of the outlawed Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV), and Nguyen Khac Toan (Ref. C) of the outlawed Independent Labor Union of Vietnam (ILUV). Media articles sometimes provide bio-data and home addresses of these individuals and describe them as "enemies of the state" working with "overseas reactionary forces" to stir up protests with a goal to overthrow the regime.

¶4. (C) Responding to a question on how to support press freedom, Son recommended the U.S. Mission strengthen its relationships with key newspapers and journals, citing Tuoi Tre ("Youth" Newspaper daily), Thanh Nien ("Young People" Newspaper daily), Phap Luat (Law Journal daily) and its HCMC version, and Tia Sang ("Ray of Light" monthly Magazine). He said these particular periodicals were known to be "more open" to democracy activists and dissidents while the rest are very "controlled by the state."

#### DEBATE ON ARTICLE FOUR OF THE GVN CONSTITUTION

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¶5. (C) Son said that, according to his contacts inside the GVN, there has been a debate within the high-levels of the GVN to "review" Article Four of the Vietnamese Constitution,

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which gives political supremacy to the CPV and essentially outlaws all other political parties. Activists say the Article contradicts other parts of the Vietnamese Constitution. According to Son, President Triet reportedly said at an August 27 meeting with the MOD Policy Department that "if Article Four is canceled, it is our political suicide." Son said the CPV leadership greatly fears the potential for "revenge" and "retaliation" if there is any kind of transition to a multi-party state in Vietnam or any change of government.

#### UNDERGROUND DEMOCRACY GROUPS BLEED BUT SURVIVE

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¶6. (C) Son said there is networking between democracy activists in the North and South of the country, but it still remains difficult to communicate and operate when MPS surveillance is omnipresent. Son commented that it is not difficult to launch an underground democracy group, but it is difficult to maintain one. He said the outlawed United Workers Farmers Organization (UWFO) launched sloppily in 2006, and as a result most of its founders were arrested and sentenced to jail in 2006 and 2007. Nevertheless, he said UWFO still survives in HCMC. The outlawed People's Democratic Party of Vietnam (PDP), he said, has lost many good people but is still organized. The group with which Son is most closely affiliated, the Democratic Party of Vietnam (DPV), led by the elderly and ailing Hoang Minh Chinh (Ref. E), has tried to gain legitimacy and work within the system calling more for a "chance to compete" rather than "regime change" and a more moderate transition to democracy. On the other side of the spectrum, he says, the more widely-covered underground Bloc 8406 movement is too loud and confrontational, more supportive of outright regime change and, in his estimation, not professional.

NGUYEN VU BINH: FIRST VISIT SINCE PRISON RELEASE

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7, (C) PolOffs visited dissident Nguyen Vu Binh, recently released from prison, at his residence in Hanoi on September 10. After approximately five years in jail, the former journalist was released to house arrest and three years probation in June 2007 (Ref. F), after years of pressure from the USG on his case. Binh asked PolOffs to convey his heart-felt thanks to U.S. President Bush, Secretary of State Rice, members of the U.S. Congress who called for his release, including Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez, and Ambassador Michael Marine. Binh said the conditions of his house arrest include regular reporting to local authorities, including a mandatory monthly visit to his precinct's People's Committee and required permission to travel outside of the precinct. His health is not bad, and he is happy to return to his writing. Undeterred by his imprisonment, Binh remains heavily involved with activities of the Democratic Party of Vietnam (DPV), along with Pham Hong Son.

BINH: DON'T BE FOOLED BY UNSC MEMBERSHIP "GOOD BEHAVIOR"

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18. (C) In an attempt by the DPV to gain legitimacy, Binh is currently working on a DPV proposal to the GVN National Assembly to establish a third-party entity in Vietnam to oversee foreign development assistance coming into Vietnam. He says the current system does not work and much development assistance is wasted or lines the pockets of corrupt party officials, and he seeks support for this project from the U.S. Mission. Binh said we should be aware that the GVN will change positively to secure UNSC non-permanent membership for 2008, but this will only be "temporary." He says the GVN's fundamental character is one of "intolerance."

ADVICE TO USG: KEEP CALLING FOR RIGHTS

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19. (C) Son and Binh made appeals similar to those of other dissidents. The United States Government must continue to do what it has been doing: raise a consistent voice calling for human rights and democracy in Vietnam and send a clear

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message of support for peaceful political activists. They recommended that we call more aggressively for reform of the judicial system, including constitutional reform. Son also said it was absolutely critical for the USG to continue to call for the release of political prisoners and specifically cited support from the U.S. Embassy and calls for his release by Ambassador Michael Marine that got him out of four years in prison. Without these efforts, Son said, he would still be in an isolation cell today.

MICHALAK